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Gender, Power, and Cricket Spectators in Calcutta, 1960s–1990s

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Abstract

Historians of modern India have emphasized the reflexivity of men and women in the making of womanhood, paying attention to notions of gender difference emerging from both primordial, restrictive codes of behaviour and contrarian impulses towards what was popularly called progress. There have been relatively few attempts to trace gender interaction in outdoor leisure activities, public displays of femininity, and male regulatory anxieties in the post-colonial context. By studying the symbolism of women's presence in the Eden Gardens, the international cricket stadium in Calcutta, from the 1960s to the 1990s, this article reflects on the nature of power, authority, and gender hierarchy in urban Indian society. This study of questions of gender hierarchy, women's mannerisms, social identity, and informal resistance through a historical lens will enable us to understand the trajectory of women's outsider status in urban public spaces. Through a reading of the mediated *parti pris* impressions of female spectators, it will also map the transition in society's approach to sport from a structured homo-social community activity to a relatively unstructured field of shared experience.

I

A cartoon published in the *Hindustan Standard* newspaper during the India–England Test match at the Eden Gardens, Calcutta, in 1961–2 featured two women. They were seated on the back row and enjoying themselves, chatting and knitting sweaters, with visible disregard to the innings in progress. The rest of the spectators, all men, were shown absorbed in the game. The caption, speculating what one of the women might have asked her companion, was, ‘One sweater and two mufflers. Yours?’¹ The cartoon captured the general attitude to female cricket spectators in Calcutta at the time. Male spectators and journalists, and sometimes female writers too, criticized female spectators for their inadequate knowledge of cricket. Many women challenged the

¹ *Hindustan Standard*, 2 Jan. 1962, p. 1.

stereotype. One of them reprimanded the cricket writer Sankariprasad Basu for considering women 'ignorant fools', claiming that she knew quite a few women who understood cricket.² In India and the rest of the world, women's cricket has since gained in popularity, women have taken to commentary and anchoring shows about men's cricket, and the number of female spectators has increased.³ Yet the conventional understanding of female fandom remains so stereotypical that a historian writing in 2005 characterized female spectators as little more than 'consumers of nationalism and modernity, designer clothes and television advertisements, martinis and the sex appeal of Rahul Dravid'.⁴ While the observation may have been valid for some people, the lack of mention of any alternative grade of spectatorship reveals the persistence of the female fan's image as an epitome of poor knowledge of sport and fascination with sportspersons.

This article studies women's attachment with sport as spectators as a means to understand the restrictive and emancipatory potentials of public spaces for gender relations in independent India. It adds sport as a fresh perspective to explore the problematic connection between women and public space in India, which has so far been examined in mostly colonial contexts and from perspectives of class, caste, marriage, labour, nationalism, migration, and so on, but not sport.⁵ This literature has emphasized the reflexivity of men and women in the making of womanhood, paying attention to the notion of gender difference emerging from both primordial, restrictive codes of behaviour and contrarian impulses towards what was popularly called progress.⁶ Relatively few historians have traced gender interaction in outdoor leisure activities, public displays of femininity, and male regulatory anxieties in the post-colonial context.⁷ The symbolism of women's presence in sport stadiums, this article argues, can reflect the nature of power, authority, and hierarchy in urban Indian society in a more nuanced manner than cinema and other popular lenses. It considers the sport stadium a useful public space for observing the regulatory mechanisms of a male-dominated society. Specifically, it examines

² Sankariprasad Basu, *Cricket omnibus I* (Calcutta, 1976), p. 119.

³ Sudeshna Banerjee, 'Fleshing out Mandira: hemming in the women's constituency in cricket', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 21 (2004), pp. 478–501; Philippa Velija, *Women's cricket and global processes: the emergence and development of women's cricket as a global game* (Basingstoke, 2015); Rafaëlle Nicholson, *Ladies and lords: a history of women's cricket in Britain* (Oxford, 2019).

⁴ Satadru Sen, 'History without a past: memory and forgetting in Indian cricket', in Stephen Wagg, ed., *Cricket and national identity in the postcolonial age: following on* (London, 2005), p. 105.

⁵ Some of the agenda-setting works are Rosalind O'Hanlon, *A comparison between women and men: Tarabai Shinde and the critique of gender relations in colonial India* (New Delhi, 1994); Samita Sen, *Women and labour in late colonial India: the Bengal jute industry* (Cambridge, 1999); Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu wife, Hindu nation: community, religion and cultural nationalism* (London, 2001).

⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The difference – deferral of (a) colonial modernity: public debates on domesticity in British Bengal', *History Workshop Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 1–34; Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured modernity: making of a middle class in colonial North India* (New Delhi, 2001), ch. 2.

⁷ See, for example, Jyoti Puri, *Woman, body, desire in post-colonial India: narratives of gender and sexuality* (New York, NY, 1999); Kenneth Bo Nielsen and Anne Waldrop, eds., *Women, gender and everyday social transformation in India* (London, 2004); Rehana Ghadially, ed., *Urban women in contemporary India: a reader* (New Delhi, 2007).

cricket matches at the Eden Gardens in Calcutta as a site in which gender structures and social hierarchies have been both reinforced and unravelled.

During the period under consideration, international cricket matches were played in two formats. The Test match took place over five consecutive days and the One-Day match over a day. Both required the presence of spectators for seven to eight hours a day in the stadium if they wanted to experience the entire run of play. With the daily presence of 60,000 spectators on average, the number reportedly swelling to 100,000 on several occasions, the Eden Gardens has been one of India's largest sites of sustained mass gathering, comparable to pilgrimages, religious festivals, and political rallies. It has been a highly visible public site where a large number of spectators socially communicated and performed their gender roles through a large part of the day. This makes the cricket stadium an ideal matrix for observing gender relations in Calcutta and India (embedding Calcutta's ethnic diversity in a broader national context), and also global womanhood on account of the frequent allusions in the press to the impact of Westernization on Indian women. Thus, the experience of cricket and its mediated representation is a model, and the least served by academics, context for making broader inferences on the history of gender relations in public spaces in India, the gendering of global sport fandom, and the politics of marginality in general.

For a long time, most men considered women trespassers in sporting spaces. The opinion on women's unsuitability to sport as athlete and spectator has not radically changed over the twentieth century, as many societies continue to set androgenic boundaries in sport. Since the 1980s, feminist scholars have undertaken substantive research into women's experience in sport and similar outdoor activities. Their works address the complexity and diversity of athletic experience, gender dichotomies, and non-binary sporting identities.⁸ Historians of gender in sport have moved beyond the boundaries of white middle-class feminism to encompass the sporting experiences of, for example, non-Christian, non-white, and non-Western women. These works have shown how the sport stadium has reflected gender divisions in society and has been pivotal in helping women transgress gender and sexual boundaries and reshape the gender order in sport and society.⁹ The sport media too plays an important role by either conservatively positioning women as objects of 'sexualized humour' in a 'man's world', or acknowledging diversity of body types, gender images and representations.¹⁰ It can both dismiss timeless misogynistic divisions, and undergird ideologies of gender and sexual difference.

⁸ Some of the important works in this genre are Pamela J. Creedon, ed., *Women, media and sport: challenging gender values* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994); Mary Ann Hall, *The girl and the game: a history of women's sport in Canada* (Peterborough, ON, 2002); Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Gertrud Pfister, eds., *Sport and women: social issues in international perspective* (London, 2003); Fan Hong and J. A. Mangan, eds., *Soccer, women, and sexual liberation: kicking off a new era* (London, 2004).

⁹ A recent collection of important works on the topic is Jennifer Hargreaves and Eric Anderson, eds., *Routledge handbook of sport, gender and sexuality* (London, 2014).

¹⁰ Michael Messner, *Taking the field: women, men, and sports* (Minneapolis, MN, 2002), p. 98.

In addition to its contribution to the history of gender relations in modern India, this article takes the literature on global women's sport fandom forward by offering a historical and South Asian perspective. Women's growing visibility as sport fans, or the 'feminization' of sport fandom, arguably began in the West in the 1990s. Women's consumerist role as fans has been attributed to their increased freedom of choice, control over lives and leisure activities, and greater exposure to sport from an early age through schools and the media. The 'female-friendly' atmosphere in the post-hooligan era stadiums has also attracted women with their enhanced comfort and safety.¹¹ A body of works on the experiences of female fans in the West has developed in the 2010s, focused on how women engage with men's and women's sport, are socialized into fandom, shed the stigma of ignorance, form a community of practice, cope with a hyper-masculine environment, negotiate consumerism and media representations, use digital technologies, and harness sport as a tool for empowerment.¹² These works, except for Stacey Pope's study of female football fans in post-war England, situate fans in the hypercommoditized sport market in the twenty-first century. As a result, they do not reflect on long-term gender relations and the transformation of gender hierarchies in society and have few insights to offer on the twentieth century.

This article frames women's increased presence and participation in the hitherto male domain of cricket spectatorship as an infrapolitical development in gendered public spaces.¹³ It makes the point that the codes of appropriate public behaviour at the Eden Gardens can illustrate the ways in which women embodied the configuration of modernity, gender, and class. Through a reading of *parti pris* impressions in newspapers and periodicals and interview-generated memories of female spectators, it maps the transition in the global society's approach to sport from a structured homosocial activity to a relatively unstructured field shared between sexes. In the absence of information on the numbers and categories (age, class, caste, sex, marital status) of

¹¹ Stacey Pope, *The feminization of sports fandom: a sociological study* (New York, NY, 2017). Other scholars such as Gary Whannel have argued that the turn to 'family audience' was a scheme to broaden club sport's support base beyond male working-class followers to counter the moral panic and security problems of hooliganism, raise money from gate receipts and merchandising, and deliver packed terraces conducive for television viewing. Gary Whannel, *Culture, politics and sport: blowing the whistle, revisited* (London, 2008), p. 104.

¹² Some relevant works are Kim Toffoletti and Peter Mewett, eds., *Sport and its female fans* (New York, NY, and London, 2012); Kim Toffoletti, *Women sport fans: identification, participation, representation* (New York, NY, 2017); Gertrud Pfister and Stacey Pope, eds., *Female football players and fans: intruding into a man's world* (Basingstoke, 2018).

¹³ James C. Scott introduced the term 'infrapolitics' to denote everyday forms of unorganized resistance against hierarchy and dominant elites that often go unnoticed. Infrapolitics is executed through mundane activities like squatting in public places, feigning ignorance, and taking unscheduled breaks at work that are not recognized as political action. Dissent of these sorts usually elude detection and fall outside the threshold of political action due to their small scope, but they are nevertheless effective as discursive practices of protest. The counterhegemonic consciousness of the actors manifested in these actions helps us understand the social condition from which they emerge. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven, CT, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts* (New Haven, CT, 1990).

spectators, it is not possible to ascertain demographic details such as the proportion of female to male spectators, the number of single or married women in the galleries, the influence of television, or whether One-Day International matches were more attractive for female spectators. Hence, the article uses published texts and oral interviews to interpret cricket spectatorship and gender structures. It has employed the term 'follower' to describe general female spectators and 'fan' for those portrayed in the press as too effusive in their support and having romantic interest in cricketers.¹⁴

II

As sociologist Jennifer Hargreaves has pointed out, men in the Western world have historically reinforced their gender privilege by determining how women would play and watch sport.¹⁵ For most of the nineteenth century, claims historian Greg Ryan, women maintained a purely supporting role within the male sporting community, being called upon to 'launch boats, donate trophies and provide victuals for participants'.¹⁶ Sport venues were also sites for men and women to meet outside the household. Some men believed that women's presence as spectators lent a civilizing and festive atmosphere to sport.¹⁷ In some of the baseball grounds in the US in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, the authorities granted free entry to women accompanied by gentlemen to curb rowdiness in the gallery.¹⁸ In interwar England, cash-strapped County Boards treated women members as affluent socialites.¹⁹ In India, women in the European and upper-class local communities performed their domestic civilizing role in the cricket grounds. They were more visible in larger cities with a greater British influence. Some communities such as the Parsis or some cities such as Bombay were more open to women's public presence.²⁰ Parsi women were regularly seen at cricket grounds in the 1890s.

Female spectatorship increased with the gradual shift of the site of play from open, unpretentious grounds to the built environment of stadiums.

¹⁴ Sociologist Richard Giulianotti categorizes sport audiences into 'supporters', 'followers', 'fans', and 'flâneurs', depending on the extent and intensity of one's identification with a sport, athlete, or team. For obvious reasons, this categorization does not have global applicability, as the conditions for the emergence of these specific forms of support were not uniform in time and space. Richard Giulianotti, 'Supporters, followers, fans, and flâneurs: a taxonomy of spectator identities in football', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 26 (2002), pp. 25–46.

¹⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, 'The Victorian cult of the family and the early years of female sports', in Eric Dunning, Joseph Maguire, and Robert Pearton, eds., *The sports process: a comparative and developmental approach* (Champaign, IL, 1994), p. 73.

¹⁶ Greg Ryan, *The making of New Zealand cricket, 1832–1914* (London, 2004), p. 21.

¹⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *The age of empire, 1875–1914* (New York, NY, 1989), p. 205.

¹⁸ The Virginia Club in the US started this practice in 1883. It was later adopted by several other clubs and evolved into the Ladies Day. W. Harrison Daniel and Scott P. Meyer, *Baseball and Richmond: a history of the professional game, 1884–2000* (Jefferson, NC, 2003), p. 14.

¹⁹ Jack Williams, *Cricket and England: a cultural and social history of the inter-war years* (London, 1999), pp. 106–11.

²⁰ Antoinette Burton, *At the heart of the empire: Indians and the colonial encounter in late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, CA, 1998), p. 173.

Historian Richard Cashman estimated that women constituted 25 to 30 per cent of the crowd at the newly built Brabourne Stadium (1938 onwards) in Bombay, a sharp rise from the fewer than 5 per cent at the erstwhile Bombay Gymkhana ground.²¹ Older male relatives usually accompanied women. The extent of knowledge of cricket among colonial women is difficult to estimate since the press and literary texts rarely articulated their voice. In colonial Bengal, most female spectators were from elite families, who sat in tents designated for specific families or for women.²² Men's inclination to control women's behaviour and mobility and hide them from sexualized male gaze prevailed over women's lived experience of cricket. One of the most notable developments in colonial urban Bengali society was the emergence of the *bhadramahila*, conceptualized by the elite patriarchy as a benign confluence of the traditional Hindu woman and the enlightened Victorian lady. Their behaviour became a yardstick of the Bengali men's class and social status.²³ In the context of Indian nationalism, women were given the responsibility for 'producing' the nation by disseminating moral and cultural values in the family and the community.²⁴ A rapid change can be discerned in the gendered dichotomy of the cricket stadium in the early 1950s.

Contemporary newspaper reports and literary texts suggest two significant developments in the 1950s as a matter of scale: first, women entering territories deemed inappropriate and unnecessary for their kind; second, women's greater self-sufficiency and independence. With greater access to education and employment, women started questioning their place in long-established customs through what historian Geraldine Forbes describes as the ideology of 'social feminism' – asserting their individual rights while fulfilling familial expectations and obligation.²⁵ Four acts passed in the 1950s, the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), the Hindu Succession Act (1956), the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956), and the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956), entitled some Hindu women to a greater say in divorce, equal inheritance of paternal property as male relatives, a fixed portion of the family's income, and more authority as children's guardians.²⁶ Some of the empowered 'new women' of the 1960s shed the stereotypes of domesticity and shared men's social pursuits, sometimes with men's encouragement. Their increasing

²¹ Richard Cashman, *Patrons, players and the crowd: the phenomenon of Indian cricket* (New Delhi, 1980), p. 117.

²² Sankariprasad Basu, *Not out* (1965), in *Cricket omnibus II* (Calcutta, 1976), pp. 99–100.

²³ The women's question was one of the most serious public issues in the nineteenth century. It revolved around how women could be modernized in keeping with contemporary male ideas of civility and modernity. The encounter of pre-colonial forms of domesticity with nineteenth-century ideologies recast notions of marriage, family, and responsibility in the context of a colonial 'native' public sphere. Meredith Borthwick, *Changing role of women in Bengal, 1849–1905* (Princeton, NJ, 1984); Geraldine Forbes, *Women in modern India* (Cambridge, 1996); Rajat Kanta Ray, *Exploring emotional history: gender, mentality and literature in the Indian awakening* (New Delhi, 2003).

²⁴ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of history: British feminists, Indian women, and imperial culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), pp. 33–44.

²⁵ Forbes, *Women in modern India*, p. 7.

²⁶ Chitra Sinha, *Debating patriarchy: the Hindu Code Bill controversy in India, 1941–1956* (New Delhi, 2012), pp. 198–202.

visibility in public spaces did not necessarily indicate class position or enhancement of status. The number of women's clubs increased, providing women a 'safe space' to socialize and endowing them with the confidence and skill to participate in public activities, and often leading to the creation of larger organizations.²⁷ Cricket matches provide useful insights into women's discursive experience of accessing leisure and navigating the social legitimacy of these practices.

Reading of the sport press and my interviews with several female spectators revealed how they negotiated patriarchy, public space, and leisure choices.²⁸ Cricket permeated the household to a great extent through vernacular radio commentary that demystified cricket jargon for women (as well as men) and piqued their interest. Some caricatures showed women to have become deeply attached to radio commentary. The evocative description of police teargassing spectators (in 1967) made listeners cry at home. A young woman on a surgery table purportedly urged the anaesthetist to wait and let her listen to the score one final time.²⁹ Exposed to discussion of cricket at home and outside, women could not have been unaffected. The Eden Gardens was centrally located and easily accessible from all parts of Calcutta and the nearest rail stations connecting to the suburbs. The leisurely pace of cricket enabled women to chat with companions, knit sweaters, or distribute food among the family without taking their attention away from the game. The uncomfortable restrooms and seats did not discourage them.³⁰ Few families were comfortable with their women going to watch cricket with a group of friends and women going by themselves was rarely an option.³¹ Affluent women went to polo matches or the racecourse with their families. As cricket appealed to people across class, stadium spectators would comprise every income group. The image of cricket as a safe, leisurely, and festive sport persuaded even the most uninterested women to join their cricket-loving relatives and friends. Many women were genuinely intrigued by cricket, while some simply wanted to see their favourite players.

Some women were compelled to take notice of the game since it was the main topic of casual conversation at home.³² Ila Sinha, sister of Prasad Sinha, the first Bengali umpire to officiate in a Test match, recollected first going to the stadium with her father, and later with her brothers and

²⁷ Benjamin Cohen, 'Networks of sociability: women's clubs in colonial and postcolonial India', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 30 (2009), pp. 169–95.

²⁸ My forthcoming book, tentatively entitled *Indian cricket and postcolonial society*, will have detailed discussions of women's knowledge of cricket. In their conversations with me from 2011 to 2017 in Kolkata, my six interviewees described how they came to know about cricket, the specific aspects of cricket that interested them, and the implications of their knowledge of cricket on gender relations in matters of leisure consumption.

²⁹ *Desh*, 35 (14 Jan. 1967), p. 1102.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1074.

³¹ Basu, *Cricket omnibus I*, p. 421.

³² Chitra Narayanan, 'The Indian spectator: a grandstand view', in Boria Majumdar and J. A. Mangan, eds., *Cricketing cultures in conflict: World Cup 2003* (London, 2004), p. 205.

cousins.³³ By interacting with her brothers who played for Sporting Union, and reading the cricket books in the family library, she amassed great historical and technical knowledge of cricket. She could identify fielders from her seat in the crowd, which even the legendary radio commentator Ajay Bose sometimes failed to do.³⁴ Sinha's account corresponds to historian Judith Walsh's theory of a shift in family relationships in late colonial India when, inspired by colonial modernity, the younger generation of Indian men conferred greater authority of the household to their wives, undermining the customary exercise of power by the earning male. Walsh further argues that this newly conceived romantic, dyadic husband–wife relationship elevated women's stature in the household.³⁵ This companionate household was a significant departure from previous home environments where authority prevailed over affection. In the new, cohesive family units, members shared leisure interest more than at any other previous historical period. While discussing such categorization of families, one must remember that the changes outlined above were class, space, and culture specific.

Post-colonial women were gradually drawn into previously denied leisure consumptions. Acknowledgement of women's agency suggests a 'democratisation of the family', following historian Indrani Chatterji's formulation about a previous historical period. But gender interaction in public spaces shows that such relationships was ambivalent rather than democratic.³⁶ In particular, men unfamiliar with how to interact with unknown women often ended up embarrassing or humiliating women, either intentionally or unknowingly.³⁷ Kabita Sinha, a feminist author, wrote about Test matches from a woman's perspective in her weekly column 'As I See It' for the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. She explains the position of female spectators with a personal story from the 1961–2 India–England Test match told in retrospect:

I saw my childhood friend Barin sitting in the same row...About an hour after the start of play, Barin convinced the man sitting next to him to exchange his seat with mine. We were happily watching the game but India soon stumbled. Barin started losing temper. The exchange of seats seemed to have caused the reversal of fortune. People overheard him and gave me murderous stares...People were not in favour of women's presence at the stadium. Now India's poor performance became my doing...Finally, India won, for the first time in Calcutta. People forgot I was there. I tried to take credit for India's victory, but Barin was in no mood to listen. Everyone returned home celebrating. But what if India had not won? The collective fury could have singed me.³⁸

³³ Personal interview with Ila Sinha, 1 July 2011, Kolkata.

³⁴ Ajay Basu, *Akash cricket bani* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 2.

³⁵ Judith Walsh, *Domesticity in colonial India: what women learned when men gave them advice* (New Delhi, 2004).

³⁶ Indrani Chatterjee, ed., *Unfamiliar relations: family and history in South Asia* (Ranikhet, 2004), p. 5.

³⁷ Burton, *At the heart of the empire*, p. 175.

³⁸ *Khelar Asar (KA)*, 2 (29 Dec. 1978), p. 64.

Sinha's experience suggests that most men considered women trespassers in a male domain in the 1960s. Unaccustomed to interacting with women in public spaces and unwilling to give up their territory, most men tenaciously clung to their masculine power and privilege. As tickets were in short supply, most cricket-loving men could not enter the stadium. They unleashed their frustration upon women who were able to watch the game, who were understandably upper class owing to their ability to procure tickets. This outrage and women's response expressed the everyday negotiation of patriarchy and paternalism in the post-colonial Bengali society. The small acts of gendered resistance against the dominant ideology of participation in public activity, which usually left little trace in public records outside newspaper reports on spectators, were hidden conflicts occurring outside the realm of politics. Explaining how infrapolitics materialize in Indian society, Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash wrote, 'social structure...appears more commonly as a constellation of contradictory and contestatory processes...neither domination nor resistance is autonomous; the two are so entangled that it becomes difficult to analyse one without discussing the other'.³⁹ Through an analysis of women's sexuality and celebrity obsession in the context of cricket, this article deepens our understanding of the implications of the operative struggle for power in public leisure activities for gender relations in society.

III

As referenced before, the centrality of male figures to most women's initiation into cricket, travel to the cricket stadium, and representation in the press meant some of the general male sentiments and anxieties regarding women's public presence were reproduced in the context of female spectatorship. A regular male spectator revealed in an interview that a large section of men considered the stadium a liberated place to swear and smoke at will. Some people were concerned that the presence of their wives or other women would curtail this freedom.⁴⁰ It seems that the mere presence and gaze of women, let alone any verbal engagement with men, subverted the male domain of the stadium.⁴¹ Scholars have pointed out that men realize the fact that in a stadium, women watch and judge the bodies and behaviour of male players and spectators.⁴² Press reports from the period under

³⁹ Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, eds., *Contesting power: resistance and everyday social relations in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1991), pp. 2–3.

⁴⁰ Personal interview with Soumyen Mallik, 30 June 2011, Kolkata.

⁴¹ Woman's gaze started to be talked about as a powerful mechanism of scrutinizing the world with the release of Satyajit Ray's *Charulata* in 1964. Throughout the film, the eponymous female lead observes the world around her so intently that, according to one commentator, her gaze controls the film's action. Her gaze was not returned with the same vigour or emotion in the film, thereby refusing her possible empowerment over the subjects of her gaze. Brinda Bose, 'Modernity, globality, sexuality, and the city: a reading of Indian cinema', *The Global South*, 2 (2008), p. 49.

⁴² Rob Hess, "'Ladies are specially invited": women in the culture of Australian Rules football', in J. A. Mangan and John Nauright, eds., *Sport in Australian society: past and present* (London, 2000), p. 118.

consideration referred to female gaze and men's attitude to the unfettering of women's cultural choices and authority over social spaces.

Few men, it appears from stories in the press, were appreciative of female spectators and radio listeners in the formerly undisputed male preserve of watching and understanding cricket. In addition to criticism of women's lack of knowledge, remarks were made about the sexuality of female spectators and the waning control over female bodies in public. The concept of the *bhadramahila*, whose 'bearing, dress, speech, and access, were insistently inter-iorised', and whose honour depended on their invisibility in the public domain, was in flux.⁴³ The publicness of the 'new women' raised confusion about the boundaries of women's respectability. This is evident from the response to the clothes and behaviour of upper-class female spectators. A *Statesman* correspondent declared in 1961 that cricket matches were occasions to parade women's fashion.⁴⁴ Achintya Kumar Sengupta began his report on the India-England Test match in 1964 with a story of a fictitious group of friends:

A number of friends, sitting cosily across two rows of benches, were watching the game, equipped with transistor, binoculars and Dunlopillo mattress. 'Do you see that woman?' 'No, I am looking at the man sitting next to her.' 'Watch the game', Barked the third. 'All in a game', Said the fourth. 'See how lovely her eyes are.' the first looked for approval. 'Don't you stare so often.' Grumbled the third again. 'Don't talk rubbish!' Chattered the first, 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.' 'I'm just watching her boyfriend.' Quibbled the second, 'A thing of beauty has a boy for ever.' 'Let him be. Not just him but a bunch of others. Nobody cares. But admit' – continued the first, 'She has beautiful eyes.' The fourth person, in whose opinion everything was a game, bellowed, 'Can a woman wearing a swimming costume can expect people to just look at her eyes?' Everyone froze for a moment. 'Watch the game; see how smooth and firm Cowdrey is even amidst the rain.' A mere 23 runs in one hour... 'Don't look at her so ridiculously.' The second warned the first. 'It will be rude not to look at her.' 'Whatever you say, isn't she feeling cold?' Wondered the fourth. 'Why will she?' He reasoned, 'A Sahara could be burning inside her.' The first guy recited like a verse, 'Can you lend a shawl to people living in Gobi-Sahara?'⁴⁵

The misogynist banter about female physicality, the evaluative and sexist remarks and description of men ogling women, and the delineation of women as entertainment during a dull event, show the lack of gender sensitivity among leading newspapers. The third person was presented as reserved and absorbed in cricket, while the other three displayed exaggerated male fantasies regarding a woman's looks and clothes. The author's lack of critique of the

⁴³ Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: modernity, nationalism, and the colonial uncanny* (London, 2005), p. 265.

⁴⁴ *Statesman*, 2 Jan. 1961, p. 12.

⁴⁵ *Ananda Bazar Patrika (ABP)*, 2 Feb. 1964, p. 1.

fourth person's opinion about the woman wearing clothes resembling swimsuits, and that she craved male gaze, evinced tacit approval of the sexual objectification of women. The fourth and the first person quoted a famous line from a poem Jatindranath Sengupta wrote in 1923 about the absurdity of romanticism in a stressful life. The poem asked affluent people to share their wealth with the less fortunate, which the friends tweaked to overlay on the woman's behaviour and their sexual desire.⁴⁶ It should be noted that in the same month as Sengupta's article was out, one Nabakumar Shil wrote a letter to the *Jugantar* criticizing male spectators for using obscene language and gestures towards women.⁴⁷ In this regard, some press reports acted as a patriarchal control that disempowered women.

Later in 1964, during the Test match against Australia, presumably the same fictitious group of friends gossiped about a woman named Jayanti who apparently hunted for a partner in the stadium. Clad in sparse clothing, Jayanti's 'tireless efforts' had proven futile so far, prompting one of the friends to suggest an 'attireless effort'.⁴⁸ Among other instances of pillorying women's putative exhibitionism, Basu wrote about an old man imploring a maiden to put on more clothes to protect herself from a chilly breeze.⁴⁹ He also wrote about a woman in the posh 35-rupees season ticket stand changing her *sari* during the lunch and tea breaks, emerging 'brand new' every session, and changing her hairstyle as frequently as the captain shuffled his bowlers on the field.⁵⁰ One of his satires in verse, published during the India–West Indies Test match in the winter of 1966–7, juxtaposed the sartorial choices of two women. As it went: 'This lady's pullover/Stripped all the Himalayan sheep bare/Another one hover/Like an ascetic, there./With nominal clothes and no care.'⁵¹ Mocking women for their clothing choice, in particular the second woman for her exhibitionist agenda and apparent lack of a sense of ideal wear for occasions, the author contributed to the widespread delegitimizing of women's rights over their bodies.

Writing in 1967, humourist Shibram Chakraborty commented on women's zeal to parade the latest fashion, if not to attract men then at least to make other women spectators envious.⁵² He hinted that women were indecisive about the function of their adorned bodies, stripping them of the agency to take decisions. About a decade later, Prafulla Roy, novelist, wrote about seven girls, aged between eighteen and twenty-two, sitting three rows down

⁴⁶ 'Cherapunjir theke,/Ekkhani megh dhar dite paro Gobi-Saharar buke?', Jatindranath Sengupta, 'Ghumer ghore' (Half asleep), in Sushanta Basu, ed., *Jatindranath Sengupter srestha kabita* (Calcutta, 2001), p. 21.

⁴⁷ *Jugantar*, 19 Feb. 1964, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *ABP*, 21 Oct. 1964, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Sankariprasad Basu, *Edene shiter dupur* (A winter afternoon at Eden) (Calcutta, 1960), p. 122.

⁵⁰ Sankariprasad Basu, *Ramaniya cricket* (Calcutta, 1960), p. 96.

⁵¹ Trans. Anirban Bandyopadhyay. The original four lines are: *Himalaya-meshpal koriya nishesh/Ek nari lomoboti poriache besh/Ornyo nari tapaswini pottimatro gaye/Huhu shite hihi hasi thotete goraye*. *ABP*, 7 Jan. 1967, p. 9.

⁵² *ABP*, 5 Jan. 1967, p. 4.

from his seat. He noted that wearing bellbottoms, *saris*, cardigans, shawls, sunglasses, and binoculars, they looked like 'a shoal of colourful fish in an aquarium'.⁵³ The girls celebrated the batting performances of Gavaskar and Viswanath and the fielding efforts of Bacchus and Gomes, laughing continuously. Most authors seemed to have reconciled with the fast disappearance of submissiveness as a cultural appendage of womanhood. Women bonding in a public space, in contrast with their prescriptive domestic role, was another symbol frequently referred to in the press. The mediated reflections on the weakening of the communal mythologies regarding women's public behaviour, albeit from a male viewpoint, highlighted women's greater independence and complexity in social roles.

In one of his weekly columns for the *Desh* in 1970, author Narayan Gangopadhyay warned against an epidemic of disrespect towards women in public.⁵⁴ Cricketers too were implicated in the rising tide of flippancy, most notably weeks before Gangopadhyay's comment was published. In 1969, the entire Indian team was rumoured to be arrested on the eve of the Test match against New Zealand in Nagpur for misbehaving with a military officer's daughter. At the team manager's behest, it was said, the chief minister asked the police to release the cricketers so that the match could take place. The Board of Control for Cricket in India formed a committee to investigate the allegation in which two senior players were particularly implicated, but no more was heard of the incident.⁵⁵ In an interview given to Gavaskar for the *Debonair* magazine, captain Pataudi denied the incident, telling him that other cricketers would deny it too.⁵⁶ The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1974 set off debates on inequality and predatory behaviour towards women, animating feminist groups into action. Although Article 15 of the Fundamental Rights in the Indian constitution mandate equal access for all sexes to public spaces, men widely denied women's rights to determine the terms of their appearance in public. Right to public space did not emerge as a movement as did the anti-price rise and the anti-alcohol mobilizations in the decade, which took place mostly in Maharashtra. Women now had more say in the national policy-making level. The press too became more sensitive to gender inequality and many leading newspapers advocated women's participation as equals in politics and development.⁵⁷ Despite the towering presence of Indira Gandhi as a powerful woman, feminist movements across the country held a deep suspicion of the state as repressive and unable to protect women's rights, and rarely collaborated

⁵³ *Jugantar*, 3 Jan. 1979, p. 1. The embodied performance of female cricketers was bracketed with that of spectators. When asked to comment on the Women's World Cup match between India and England on 1 January 1978, two male spectators remarked that women looked smart in men's clothing. *Saradiya Khelar Asar (SKA) 1979 Annual Number*, p. 90.

⁵⁴ *Desh*, 37 (6 Feb. 1970), pp. 115–16.

⁵⁵ *Dainik Basumati (DB)*, 31 Oct. 1969, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Saradiya Khela 1985 Annual Number*, p. 87.

⁵⁷ Mangala Subramaniam, *The power of women's organizing: gender, caste, and class in India* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 32.

with governments before the mid-1980s.⁵⁸ One scholar has called Gandhi ‘distinctly unfeminist’.⁵⁹ Examples of gender interaction in the cricket stadium illustrated some of the anxieties of men about women’s liberation and greater autonomy of choice, as well as growing feminism in the country.

Discussions of appropriate clothing for female spectators were one of the outlets for this anxiety. Clothes were a significant part of constructing the ideal upper-class/caste woman. In the colonial period, the aesthetic form and moral content of a *bhadramahila*, one scholar has argued, was informed by nationalist discourses of creating the ideal female in response to colonial critiques of ‘animality and sensuality of Bengali/pagan women in particular’.⁶⁰ One of the outcomes of the Indian intelligentsia’s moral reform projects in response to European allegations of their innate incapability to self-improve was imposition of a restrictive code of honour upon Indian women. Shame was an important aspect of women’s behaviour under this patriarchal nationalist enterprise that was carried out chiefly through sex-appropriate clothing. The sexually chastened female body became an icon for the emerging aspirations of Bengali culture and nationalism.⁶¹ The normative assumptions about and restrictions on women’s bodies in colonial Bengal were gradually replaced by different sets of norms. Greater autonomy of women over their bodies and behaviour was widely seen as a result of the corrupting influence of a monolithic, depraved West, especially in films and political ideologies.⁶² The fracturing of men’s sovereignty over women’s subjectivities as social beings has been one of the most publicly discussed topics in modern India and has had enormous bearing on the gender practices through which the post-colonial nation has been fabricated into existence.

In comparison with the evidences mustered by the Hindu Law Committee in the 1940s, the socio-economic position of middle-class women had changed

⁵⁸ Aradhana Sharma, *Logics of empowerment: development, gender, and governance in neoliberal India* (Minneapolis, MN, 2008), pp. 35–6.

⁵⁹ Asha Nadkarni, *Eugenic feminism: reproductive nationalism in the United States and India* (Minneapolis, MN, 2014), p. 11.

⁶⁰ Himani Bannerji, *Inventing subjects: studies in hegemony, patriarchy and colonialism* (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 125–9.

⁶¹ Himani Banerjee, ‘Attired in virtue: the discourse on shame and clothing of the *bhadramahila* in colonial Bengal’, in Bharati Ray, ed., *From the seams of history: essays on Indian women* (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 67–106.

⁶² A large number of films from Bollywood and other regional industries have thrived on the popular assumption that the East is superior to the West. Similarly, certain political parties, most notably the Bharatiya Janata Party, routinely invoke the harm wrought by Western culture upon Indian traditions. One cannot reduce these ideologies to cultural atavism, as their proponents are often the proponents of women’s rights. Women are also often apprehensive of how elite, bourgeois, Westernized women might reshape their known world. Asha Kasbekar, ‘Negotiating the myth of the female ideal in popular Hindi cinema’, in Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney, eds., *Pleasure and the nation: the history, politics, and consumption of public culture in India* (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 286–308; Amrita Basu, ‘Hindu women’s activism in India and the questions it raises’, in Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu, eds., *Appropriating gender: women’s activism and politicized religion in South Asia* (London, 1998), pp. 167–84; Kumkum Sangari, ‘Violent acts: cultures, structures and retraditionalisation’, in Bharati Ray, ed., *Women of India: colonial and post-colonial periods* (New Delhi, 2005), pp. 159–82.

indubitably by the 1970s.⁶³ Having acquired equal inheritance and property rights, and the necessary training to obtain relevant jobs, urban women were now in principle uncoupled from their heteronormative familial relationships.⁶⁴ Many families started to depend on their earnings.⁶⁵ However, sustaining the family did not always give them equal power of decision-making as male members. The overall attitude to women remained paternalistic.⁶⁶ As spaces of recreation continued to open up for more women across class barriers, most notably cinema and theatre, the question of women's autonomy over their bodies and leisure interests frequently came under criticism. Groups of women in cinemas, sport grounds, or political rallies sometimes raised safety concern. Many families were still alarmed by the sight of a solitary woman in a public assembly, and even as part of a sports team. Some conservative households considered an independent woman immoral. As structural referents to womanhood in public spaces, keeping late nights, smoking, drinking, dressing in Western attire as opposed to Indian outfits, and male friends superficially but powerfully determined women's personalities. Some women found other women's sartorial conventions as subversive of Indian traditions in a meek surrender to immorality. One of them, Archana Chattapadhyay, said in a letter to the *Khelar Asar* magazine that one knew a disreputable woman by her trousers.⁶⁷

Some agents of consumption, such as newspaper columnists, fetishized the female spectator's feminine attributes, invariably portrayed as the attractive and elegant components of the galleries. The dressed and ornamented female body was central to this process. In addition to adorning signs of gender such as clothing, make-up, and hairstyle, bodily gestures articulated and affirmed one's gender role.⁶⁸ As we have observed, cricket writers used gender stereotypes to describe women's involvement with the game. They exaggerated women's irrationality, and often focused on women's transgressive roles with the aim to draw both casual and critical male readers. Also, at a time when India lost more matches than they even came close to winning, the descriptions of spectators often elicited more interest than the match itself. Female writers sometimes used satire to counter these judgmental attitudes. In an article for the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Sudeshna Barua gloated that she

⁶³ Sinha, *Debating patriarchy*, p. 229.

⁶⁴ Anupama Roy, *Gendered citizenship: historical and conceptual explorations* (orig. edn 2005; New Delhi, 2013), p. 217.

⁶⁵ In the film *Meghe dhaka tara* (*The cloud-capped star*), 1960, a refugee family survives on the elder girl child's income. They even refuse to arrange her marriage, afraid that once out of her house she will be unable to contribute as much to the family. Samita Sen has pointed out some of the problems with working women, in particular the question of a working woman's commitment to family, marginalization in industrial work, and the ideology of women's subservience to men in the family. See Samita Sen, 'Gendered exclusion: domesticity and dependence in Bengal', *International Review of Social History*, 42 (1997), pp. 65–86.

⁶⁶ *Hindustan Standard Annual Number*, 1969, p. 81.

⁶⁷ *KA*, 3 (29 Feb. 1980), p. 18.

⁶⁸ Jayne Caudwell, 'Femme-fatale: re-thinking the femme-inine', in Jayne Caudwell, ed., *Sport, sexualities and queer/theory* (London, 2006), p. 146.

took one hour and a half to dress, keeping her brother and his friends waiting, and strolled into the stadium expecting looks of admiration.⁶⁹ Throughout the article, Barua feigned conventional attributes of inadequate knowledge, aversion to details, impatience with the game's pace, and fascination with cricketers, all the while evidencing her understanding of the game.

Newspapers highlighted female celebrities attending a match to attract male readership. During the India–West Indies Test match in 1966–7, they covered every movement of the actresses Sharmila Tagore and Anju Mahendru, the prospective partners of the India captain Pataudi and the West Indies captain Garry Sobers. The *Dainik Basumati* sent a reporter to Sobers's hotel room to check on him and Mahendru.⁷⁰ In 1979, a man fell from the concrete gallery next to the Club House trying to catch a glimpse of Tagore.⁷¹ The media's stratagems of sensationalism, which met with feminist criticism of collusion with patriarchy, continued throughout the later decades. A report about the India–Sri Lanka World Cup semi-final match in 1996 mentioned that the Indian captain Mohammad Azharuddin's fiancée the former Miss India Sangeeta Bijlani wore a green full sleeve t-shirt and black gloves, and Maria, an unmarried foreign tourist, was in a white and green striped t-shirt.⁷² The description of an Indian celebrity and a tourist continued the journalistic practice of identifying women by their appearance. The history of women's objectification outlined in this section manifests how little had changed, except a certain degree of refinement in description.

A common tendency among men was to blame women as a distraction. In 1969, the *Dainik Basumati* distinctly mentioned that many among the 20,000 people who disrupted Australia's net practice were women.⁷³ Most female football fans could not attend important matches due to the violent and hostile atmosphere created by partisan male supporters, so they sometimes went to practice sessions. In a letter to *Khelar Asar*, one Sanjay De mentioned that at a forum organized by the Left Front government on 29 July 1979, coach P. K. Banerjee had entreated women not to attend practice sessions. Apparently, the footballer Sabbir Ali had refused to shoot a ball with his weaker left foot in fear of being ridiculed by female onlookers. De wanted to publicize Banerjee's grumblings so that female readers of the magazine stopped attending practice.⁷⁴ Female readers predictably blasted his sexist opinion of women as objects of distraction. Why should women take the blame for a footballer's lack of confidence? Any suggestion of women's attraction to the charisma of footballers rather than a passion for football would have possibly been generated by the actions of one or two women, and generalization would be a gross misjudgement, they said.⁷⁵ When the Calcutta Cricket and Football Club considered granting membership to women, the

⁶⁹ *Amrita Bazar Patrika Sunday Magazine*, 2 Jan. 1977, p. 1.

⁷⁰ *DB*, 7 Jan. 1967, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Jugantar*, 1 Jan. 1979, p. 3.

⁷² *ABP*, 14 Mar. 1996, p. 11.

⁷³ *DB*, 11 Dec. 1969, p. 6.

⁷⁴ *KA*, 3 (31 Aug. 1979), p. 28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 (21 Sept. 1979), p. 10.

noted sport commentator Pearson Surita expressed a strong objection in a letter to the club's president. He stated that admitting single or married women would constitute 'a real danger to the physical or other well-being' of male members. He refused to speak at the Annual General Meeting of the club in front of women, afraid that women's presence would 'cramp' his speech delivery.⁷⁶ In a hegemonic spatial strategy of marginalizing women, men like P. K. Banerjee and Pearson Surita used their male privilege to exclude women from the sporting community. The constitution of women as objects of desire was further reinforced by inappropriate behaviour that bordered on violence.

Men often respond to what they consider recalcitrant femininity with aggression. Inappropriate behaviour towards female spectators probably existed since the beginning of stadium sport in India, but instances started to be documented in the press in the 1990s, possibly coinciding with the widening of feminist sensibilities. The press reported widespread indecent banter by people sitting in the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) member galleries during the India–England Test match in 1993. Some men who uttered obscenities at women also insulted a seventy-five-year-old man for protesting, and hurled banana and orange skins at bald heads and paper planes at everyone. At the centre of the commotion was a group of men in the annual members' gallery at Block G. They wore decent clothes, came from affluent families, and some were students of some of the city's better colleges and universities. In a different block, the correspondent saw a married woman nearly fainting on account of the remarks made about her. Apparently, other spectators were irritated but no one protested.⁷⁷ Finally, a police officer grabbed two men by their collars and dragged them away, promising to teach them unforgettable lessons, while his colleagues made several arrests at Block F.⁷⁸ This was one of the many instances of heckling women that were published in the press in the 1990s and later. Most women ignored the banter and pretended not to have heard anything.

Scholars of cinema and women's work in modern India have discussed these changes to an extent. An ethnographic research on the gaze of male Hindi filmgoers in 1991 offered a conclusion that while watching female actors in a film, men distinguished between the 'legitimate objects of the gaze' and women who should be spared the gaze. These men reinforced male dominance by objectifying women and, simultaneously, limiting women's public activities in order to protect them from 'corrupt' behaviour.⁷⁹ Women's sexualized depiction in most Indian 'commercial' films operated through suggestive tropes rather than explicit nudity. Feminist scholar Jigna Desai has called this 'the erotic promise' – which invites the audience's imagination while conceding little

⁷⁶ Sujoy Gupta, *Seventeen ninety-two: a history of the Calcutta Cricket & Football Club* (Calcutta, 2002), p. 96.

⁷⁷ *ABP*, 2 Feb. 1993, p. 12.

⁷⁸ *Telegraph*, 2 Feb. 1993, p. 15.

⁷⁹ Steve Derné and Lisa Jadwin, 'Male Hindi filmgoers' gaze: an ethnographic interpretation of gender construction', in Ghadially, ed., *Urban women*, pp. 46–62.

sexual agency to female characters.⁸⁰ The production and reception of Indian films are sites of confrontation between the so-called conservative and liberal approaches to women's activities. The interplay of power and fantasy was so woven into the texture of everyday consumption of leisure that it probably informed changes in behaviour towards women in public. A major difference between the cinema and stadium audience is the normative silence and absence of communication among the cinema audience, whereas the extensive and noticeable interaction among people in the cricket galleries expressed the attitude towards women more clearly and provided content for the press.

The sociological and anthropological studies of the construction of gender identities in the mass media in the 1990s, especially anthropologist Purnima Mankekar's work on the serials aired on national television, offer important insights that might help understand this surge in violence. In most *Doordarshan* serials, Mankekar argues, women were defined through the contrasting tropes of morality and sexuality. The ideal 'new Indian woman' of the 1990s was educated, working outside home, yet chaste and devoted to the family and the nation. The problematic women were wives and lovers with an unabashed sexuality that corrupted men and by extension the nation.⁸¹ Elsewhere, Mankekar argues that the spread of erotics through television programmes had an extensive influence on personal disposition, if not public behaviour, as television added a tactile dimension to the pleasure of gazing upon and desiring commodities.⁸² These studies suggest a mediated proliferation of notions of acceptable female sexuality. Incidentally, representations in the sport press moved to the opposite direction, becoming more gender sensitive and value neutral. Some sport magazines had started putting female athletes on their covers in the 1980s, the frequency of which increased in the 1990s. Therefore, one cannot say that men's patronizing and aggressive behaviour towards women in the stadium was mainly influenced by women's sexualized representations in the media. The threat of violence did not deter women from embracing their sexuality as a means of resisting male fantasies and proclaiming the autonomy of their bodies. In the 1980s–90s, women were seen to shout, wave banners with messages to cricketers, and dance in the galleries. The openness and unapologetic nature of female spectatorship was manifest most explicitly in how women behaved around cricketers.

IV

Writing about the conjugal fantasies of young Bengali women in Calcutta in the 1950s–60s, anthropologist Manisha Roy states that besides Hollywood stars, women were attracted to cricketers and tennis players.⁸³ In an interview

⁸⁰ Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood: the cultural politics of South Asian diasporic film* (New York, NY, 2004), pp. 98–9.

⁸¹ Purnima Mankekar, *Screening culture, viewing politics: an ethnography of television, womanhood, and nation in postcolonial India* (Durham, NC, 1999).

⁸² Purnima Mankekar, 'Dangerous desires: television and erotics in late twentieth-century India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 63 (2004), pp. 403–31.

⁸³ Manisha Roy, *Bengali women* (orig. edn 1970; Chicago, IL, 1992), p. 59.

with Roy, a woman admitted her desire for Gregory Peck and added that her friend liked the cricketer Naresh Kumar.⁸⁴ The actress Arati Bhattacharya ‘fell in love’ with Pataudi by just reading about his personality.⁸⁵ The actress and politician Jayalalitha, more popularly known as Amma, trained his binoculars on Pataudi.⁸⁶ Mala Sinha’s character in the film *Love marriage* (1959) had posters of Vinoo Mankad and Khandu Rangnekar in her room. The journalist Nilima Sen Gangopadhyay wrote that tennis players were popular among elite women, whereas footballers and cricketers were acceptable across social classes.⁸⁷ A short story by Gour Kishor Ghosh gives us a glimpse into a High Court judge’s daughter’s fascination with the batsman Budhi Kunderan. Set during the India–England Test match in 1964, the story is about the woman’s plan to garland and embrace Kunderan on the cricket field and then collapse unconscious on his lap. Her dream cannot materialize without a ticket, so she goes on hunger strike to force her father to use his influence to acquire a ticket for her.⁸⁸ In Suchitra Bhattacharya’s novel *Nil Ghurni*, set in the 1990s, cricketers were as much part of dinner table conversations at girls’ hostels as were Bollywood stars and politicians, showing the continuance of enthusiasm about cricket.⁸⁹ This degree of enthusiasm among women, evident in real life incidents as well, expanded cricket’s domain by creating new topics of discussion and followers for the game.

In 1972–3, after India defeated England, students from Bethune College beat drums, danced, organized a march, and smeared each other with vermilion. Indian captain Ajit Wadekar evaded a woman’s embrace with the ‘dexterity of ducking under a bumper’, as one newspaper reported.⁹⁰ In 1975, two young girls fell unconscious in the commotion as followers gathered around the hotel to congratulate the Indian team on their win against the West Indies.⁹¹ The female followers’ groupie moment finally arrived in 1979 as a bunch of young girls reportedly invaded the team hotel and banged on the doors of Indian and Caribbean cricketers. The cricketers locked themselves in, trying to prevent the girls from entering, as the employees and the police looked on helplessly.⁹² After this incident, female constables were assigned to team hotels and given the power to apprehend female followers, in addition to their duties at the galleries. The press was replete with comments about the ‘nuisance’ caused by female followers. In two decades, the focus turned from women’s illegitimacy to unacceptable zeal as cricket followers. One journalist

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69. Roy forgot to mention that Naresh Kumar was a tennis player (fuelling some suspicion about knowledge of sports even among highly educated women).

⁸⁵ SKA 1981 Annual Number, p. 128.

⁸⁶ *Outlook*, 4 May 1998, www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-life-and-times-of-jayalalitha/205450, accessed 15 Jan. 2016.

⁸⁷ KA, 2 (13 Apr. 1979), pp. 22–3.

⁸⁸ Gour Kishor Ghosh, ‘Saptam gulpo’ (Seventh story), in *Brajadar gulpo samagra* (Calcutta, 1996), p. 40.

⁸⁹ Suchitra Bhattacharya, *Nil ghurni* (Blue whirlpool) (Calcutta, 2000), p. 7.

⁹⁰ *Jugantar*, 5 Jan. 1973, p. 8.

⁹¹ DB, 2 Jan. 1975, p. 3.

⁹² *Jugantar*, 2 Jan. 1979, p. 3.

mooted the idea of players bringing their wives on tours, to keep discipline and deter female followers.⁹³ Reports on incidents like these foregrounded a class dimension, suggesting women from the lower income groups of society were more prone to effusive displays. The ascription of specific forms of behaviour to one's class position could be seen as the press's tool for both indicating the proliferation of cricket following beyond the upper middle class and associating trouble with the non-elite section of society. The narratives of the kiss and the judge's daughter, however, undermine the strength of these constructs.

In the 1980s, television brought cricketers closer to the public. Watching cricketers move on the field more clearly from one's room than was possible from the gallery added a new visceral layer and intimacy to visual appreciation of their craft and body. In the opinion of international relations scholar Sankaran Krishna, 'the sight of a sweaty Imran Khan, shirt open a good ways down to the waist, loping in to bowl in his snug flannels set many hearts racing. I can't vouch for this but when Mr Khan was on screen, there certainly seemed to be more women watching raptly.'⁹⁴ Using one's senses and emotions to interact with the subject on screen, the audience are able to connect with the moving image of a person, which may lead to a strong emotional attachment.⁹⁵ Many scholars have suggested that media coverage has played a significant role in making certain physically attractive male players celebrities, which has had a profound impact on stoking the interest of women in the sport. The media usually portrayed female fans as strange and ill-behaved. The more knowledgeable female followers of cricket found this an offensive manner of demeaning their struggle to breach sport spectatorship's male domain.⁹⁶ In Bengal, with the number of women in employment declining through the 1980s and 1990s, contrary to the general national trend, it can be supposed that most women stayed at home and the television became an important tool for them to engage with the outside world.⁹⁷

Pakistani cricketers and Imran Khan in particular featured the most in stories about female fans and non-Indian cricketers.⁹⁸ During the India–Pakistan Test match in 1980, Sadiq Mohammad brought a female guest and demanded a free ticket for her. As the guards refused to let her in without a ticket, he threatened to pull out of the match.⁹⁹ The CAB treasurer, Jagmohan

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ *espncriinfo.com*, 4 Mar. 2014, www.espncriinfo.com/blogs/content/story/725123.html, accessed 12 Oct. 2015.

⁹⁵ The disembodied bonding between the distant subject and the audience has been discussed in several works, namely, Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal thoughts: embodiment and moving image culture* (Berkeley, CA, 2004).

⁹⁶ Pope, *The feminization of sport fandom*.

⁹⁷ Henrike Donner, 'Making middle-class families in Calcutta', in James G. Carrier and Don Kalb, eds., *Anthropologies of class: power, practice, and inequality* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 131–48.

⁹⁸ Imran Khan has been described as 'a celebrity and a star; an object of desire, tough, sexy, incredibly handsome', with a 'reputation as a playboy, his numerous girlfriends (mostly white), his reputedly dissolute lifestyle and his pukka Oxbridge accent'. Pnina Werbner, 'Anthropology, cultural performance and Imran Khan', in Stephen Nugent and Cris Shore, eds., *Anthropology and cultural studies* (London, 1997), pp. 48–51.

⁹⁹ *Jugantar*, 31 Jan. 1980, p. 1.

Dalmiya, salvaged the situation by offering a guest pass from his personal quota.¹⁰⁰ There were rumours about a Bombay actress calling Imran regularly.¹⁰¹ During the Test match he received no less than 200 fan letters, most of which were sent by girls aged fifteen to twenty-five, professing love and admiration. Some of the letter-writers proposed marriage and wanted to meet Khan.¹⁰² Sometimes cricketers escorted women to the dressing room. Zaheer Abbas was once seen sitting there surrounded by women.¹⁰³ Photojournalist S. S. Kanjilal had an unpleasant encounter with Majid Khan at a party. Taking exception to being photographed in conversation with some attractive girls, Khan started abusing him and demanded the film roll to be handed over. Kanjilal, undeterred, asked him to come to the studio if he needed to see the negatives before the photographs were processed.¹⁰⁴ At least two Pakistani cricketers had romantic affairs with Indian women. In 1983, after a six-year courtship, actress Reena Roy quit Bollywood to marry Mohsin Khan. The relationship between Sarfraz Nawaz and Sheetal, actress and producer, became acrimonious soon after it started. Sheetal, suspicious that Nawaz was after her property, broke up with him on the eve of Pakistan's tour of Australia in 1984.¹⁰⁵ Nawaz maintained that Sheetal was no more than a fan who posed with him for a few photographs at a party. When an Indian film magazine published the photographs along with a story about their romantic relationship, the rumours reportedly landed him in trouble with his family.¹⁰⁶ The media was now taking an active interest in the personal lives of cricketers, rather than simply reporting their sporting performance. Women's visibility, emphasized femininity, and sexualized roles had by now become a resource for journalists to increase their readership.¹⁰⁷

In 1983, some 'ultramodern' women reportedly heckled the Caribbean cricketers looking for leatherworks and suitcases in the New Market. The women's behaviour was 'disrespectful' and 'humiliating'.¹⁰⁸ Two days later, a flirtatious woman apparently forced Viv Richards to abandon his search for the right pair of shoes and return to his hotel. The report was concluded with an agonized comment that such attitude was not seen elsewhere in the cricket world.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁰ *Amrita Bazar Patrika (AmBP)*, 31 Jan. 1980, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ *Jugantar*, 1 Feb. 1980, p. 6.

¹⁰² *DB*, 1 Feb. 1980, p. 3.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 4 Feb. 1980, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Sharadiya Khela*, 1983, pp. 112–13.

¹⁰⁵ *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 4 Mar. 1984, p. 55.

¹⁰⁶ *KA*, 7 (2 Mar. 1984), p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Raewyn Connell introduced the term 'emphasised femininity' to describe how women perform the roles ascribed to them by men, therefore surrendering to 'hegemonic masculinity'. R. W. Connell, *Gender and power* (Cambridge, 1987). Connell's idea of women's submissive role in society has been criticized for its essentialism, contrary to the admiration for her nuanced understanding of masculinity. For a concise account of Connell's criticism, see Carrie Paechter, 'Rethinking the possibilities for hegemonic femininity: exploring a Gramscian framework', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 68 (May–June 2018), pp. 121–8.

¹⁰⁸ *Jugantar*, 14 Dec. 1983, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 Dec. 1983, p. 7.

During the 1987 World Cup, a squad of disguised detectives were tasked with preventing women from entering team hotels.¹¹⁰ These reports written by male journalists, however deprecating of women's behaviour, acknowledged women's resistance against normative behaviour in public spaces. A reversal of women's representation as a new form of predatory cricket followers was seen in the *Jugantar's* report on the assignment of 'good-looking' sub-inspectors to protect the wives of cricketers and administrators, and female travellers.¹¹¹ Insinuation of some of the dangers of women working in public spaces was made in a report on the West Indian fast bowler Patrick Patterson ambling over to talk to the hotel receptionist while watching the final match on the television at the foyer.¹¹² The ambivalence towards women suggested that though the irrational fans among them seemed aggressive, the docile working women who represented the ideal Indian female were still considered vulnerable.

These anonymous women, in all their classless ordinariness, did not camouflage their form of resistance, but openly challenged the line demarcating masculine and feminine behaviour. Such behaviour differs from the infrapolitics we have discussed so far and has more in common with Asef Bayat's formulation of everyday resistance as a flexible and adaptive practice of gaining more autonomy. Bayat's theory is based upon the urban poor's resistance against authority, which starts with individual efforts but becomes collective soon after the powers that be take notice and attempt to quell the resistance. Collective resistance operates through a 'passive network' of people with a unity of purpose. This imagined rather than organized solidarity makes the eagerness for a more permissive society more powerful and persistent.¹¹³ The acts of gate-crashing hotels and interacting with male cricketers liberated cricket-loving women from the conventional and conservative social attitudes regarding women's behaviour in public. By flouting the social injunctions on public etiquette, some women caused a furore. Thronging one's favourite cricketer was a sign of hero worship for men, but an act of sexual transgression for women. The symbolism associated with female spectators' celebrity obsession remained centred on the paradigm of non-conformity, but its representation in the press gradually waned as too many women started sharing the behavioural pattern. This is not to claim that the fear of crime against women and the disadvantage of being a woman in a 'man's world' decreased significantly over the decades. Yet, the little acts of intrusion empowered female spectators to resist the social control enacted around participation in sport. These actions symbolized the beginning of the end of women's marginality as spectators, or, to quote feminist scholar Jill Dolan, the parting bell for women's role as a 'tacit support system or as decoration that enhances and directs the pleasure of the male spectator's gaze'.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1987, p. 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *AmBP*, 9 Nov. 1987, p. 11.

¹¹³ Asef Bayat, 'Cairo's poor: dilemmas of survival and solidarity', *Middle East Report*, 202 (Winter 1997), pp. 2–12; 'Un-civil society: the politics of the "informal people"', *Third World Quarterly*, 18 (1997), pp. 53–72; 'From "dangerous classes" to "quiet rebels": politics of the urban subaltern in the Global South', *International Sociology*, 15 (2000), pp. 533–57.

¹¹⁴ Jill Dolan, *The feminist spectator as critic*, 2nd edn (Ann Arbor, MI, 2012), p. 2.

Although female spectators were not able to overwrite completely the narrative of marginality, because meanings of gendered actions are ever fluid, their actions reveal how they understood the cultural meanings of femininity and the representations of womanhood.

V

'Outsiders', wrote sociologist Robert K. Merton, are those 'who have been systematically frustrated by the social system: the disinherited, deprived, disenfranchised, dominated, and exploited'.¹¹⁵ The popular discourse of women's presence and interaction with men in and around the Eden Gardens, replete with stories ranging from ridiculing to assaulting women, would suggest a permanent 'outsider' status for women. The article's analysis of press reports revealed systemic and symbolic male dominance through routine emphasis and capitalizing on women's otherness. Most female spectators were depicted until the mid-1970s as scarcely having any personal agenda, acting mostly in consort with their family and friends, with the primary desire to flaunt their sexuality. Cricket writers used abundant gender stereotypes, presumably as a 'profitable provocation' and challenging the boundary of civility, to popularize their work.¹¹⁶ Their writings reflected a canonical drive for subjugating women, framing them in a distinctly patriarchal manner.

Yet, the boundaries of 'femininity' certainly failed to regulate the entry and conduct of women within or outside the cricket stadium. Through an exploration of mediated representations of women, the article has traced the history of women's marginalization and resilience. The focus on the diverse audience at a sport stadium has enabled it to study women across class, ethnicity, and age. This has helped the article to articulate what people expected from women of a certain class or group, and what impact this reciprocity of expectation and delivery of specific behaviour had on gender relations in the wider society. The press recognized some of the liberal feminist aesthetic of women's autonomy of action. Women's voice worked through either erasing their difference from men or foregrounding their form of spectatorship as unique and acceptable. The sarcasms applied to female spectators were steadily replaced with acknowledgment of new forms of spectatorship as women gradually emerged as potential consumers of newspapers and cricket.¹¹⁷ Men in general still implicitly regulated the gendered space primarily because they were the

¹¹⁵ Robert K. Merton, 'Insiders and outsiders: a chapter in the sociology of knowledge', *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (1972), p. 29.

¹¹⁶ The term 'profitable provocation' has been used in relation to how the media objectifies women to sell their content. William Mazzarella and Raminder Kaur, 'Between sedition and seduction: thinking censorship in South Asia', in Raminder Kaur and William Mazzarella, eds., *Censorship in South Asia: cultural regulation from sedition to seduction* (Bloomington, IN, 2009), p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Female literacy percentage in West Bengal jumped from 20.79 in 1961 to 26.56 in 1971 and to 34.42 in 1981, while the male average grew from 47.69 to 57.03 in the twenty years. No data on the demographics of newspaper readership is available from this period. Considering 'literate' people read newspapers, the number of reading women was now presumably higher than ever, and the press could not risk losing this readership by publishing comical reports. www.education.nic.in/cd50years/g/z/EI/0ZEI0401.htm, accessed 21 Dec. 2011.

agents to create and conduct stadium events. Representations of women recast the stadium as a site of struggle rather than of autonomous existence of actors. The study of questions of gender hierarchy, women's mannerisms, social identity, and informal resistance through a historical lens has enabled this article to offer new insights into the trajectory of Indian women's outsider status in urban public spaces.

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